

## INFLUENCE OF THE MEDIAEVAL CHRISTIAN VISIONS ON JEAN DE MEUN'S NOTIONS OF HELL

WE have many guarantees of the popularity of Christian vision literature in the Middle Ages. It was a product of the Church, without doubt the best medium of publicity in that period. Visions are incorporated in the works of the most popular church writers, such, for example, as the Dialogues of Gregory the Great, and the Venerable Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*. Certain ones, appearing independently, have come down to us in many Latin manuscripts widely distributed as to place and date of origin. Such are, among others, the apocryphal Vision of Saint Paul and the Vision of Tundal. Twenty-two Latin manuscripts of the former were known to its editor, Brandes. Its form indicates that it was intended either as a sermon or as an epistle, in either case sure of coming to the notice of many persons. It begins: "Oportet vos, fratres karissimi, amare delicias paradisi et timere penas inferni, que ostense sunt Paulo apostolo, quando fuit in carcere in hoc mundo." And incorporated in the vision is another indication of the same sort: "Expavescite, fratres karissimi, et benefacite, quantum possitis, et timete deum et date gloriam et honorem deo et omnibus sanctis eius, ut vos exaltet in opere bono et perducat in vitam eternam, ne intretis in infernum," etc. Of the Vision of Tundal fifty-four Latin manuscripts are known, and its popularity may be judged by the following statement made by the French monk Alberic of Trois-Fontaines, in his chronicle dating from the first half of the thirteenth century: "Facta est in Hibernia hoc anno (*i. e.*, 1149) quedam mirabilis visio de penis inferni et gaudiis paradisi, que Tugdali visio appellatur. Hanc si quis plane scire desiderat, in multis abbatiis poterat reperire."<sup>1</sup> With such testimony before us, it is safe to postulate that Jean de Meun, who seems to have been an omnivorous reader, knew some at least of the Christian visions, and an examination of his portion of the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Visio Tnugdali*, hgg. von A. Wagner, Erlangen, 1882, p. xiv.

*Roman de la Rose* confirms our suspicions, as will presently be shown.<sup>2</sup>

The most flourishing period of the production of the Christian visions, the time at which they were longest and most detailed, lies between the middle of the twelfth century and the first decade of the thirteenth century. Significantly enough, the flourishing period of these visions immediately precedes in point of time the flourishing period of French allegory. The most cursory examination of the two phenomena discloses similarities of structure and content which may hardly be considered fortuitous. Such are the dream form, common to both, and the correspondence of the typical features of the Paradise of the Christian visions with those of the Garden of Love in the lay allegories. Here, however, we are upon debatable ground, for Love's Paradise is as old as Tibullus. Demonstrable proof of interrelationship between the Christian visions and French allegory is more readily found in the references to Hell and Purgatory than in the comparison of paradises divine and erotic.

In the second part of the *Roman de la Rose*, Jean de Meun has little to say about Paradise. On the other hand, he gives us occasional glimpses of his notion of Hell, and it is in these passages that he betrays his indebtedness to the Christian visions. The first of them is perhaps unconscious. Compare the following lines from the *Anticlaudianus* of Alanus de Insulis, *distinctio septima, cap. ix*:<sup>3</sup>

Multus in hunc amnem populus descendit, et altis  
Consepelitur aquis, tumidoque impellitur amne,

with their adaptation by Jean de Meun (*Rose*, vv. 6787-6790, edition of Francisque Michel):

Plusor en cest flueve s'en entre,  
Non pas solement jusqu'au ventre,  
Ains i sunt tuit enseveli,  
Tant se plument ès flos de li.

<sup>2</sup> Langlois, *Origines et Sources du Roman de la Rose*, Paris, 1891, p. 55, refers to the mediaeval Christian visions and to their share in the impulse that brought Guillaume de Lorris to use the dream form for his love allegory, but he does not suggest the possibility of any influence upon the second part of the *Roman de la Rose*.

<sup>3</sup> *The Anglo-Latin Satirical Poets and Epigrammatists of the Twelfth Century*, by Thomas Wright, vol. ii, London, 1872, p. 268 ff. Cf. Langlois, *op cit.*, p. 149.

The difference is important. What did Jean de Meun know about partial immersion as a punishment? The lines would have no meaning did we not refer them to the descriptions of the streams and pools of the Hell of the Christian visions in which the damned are submerged to various degrees according to their sins. For instance, the Vision of Saint Paul:<sup>4</sup>

Et vidit ibi multos homines dimersos in flumine ignito; alii usque ad genua, alii usque ad umbilicum, alii usque ad labia, alii usque ad supercilia erant mersi. Tunc flevit Paulus et suspiravit et interrogavit angelum, qui essent dimersi usque ad genua. Et dixit angelus: 'Hi sunt, qui furtum fecerunt et rapinam et luxuriam et inde penitenciam non egerunt et ad ecclesiam non venerunt.' 'Domine, qui sunt hi, qui usque ad umbilicum?' Respondit angelus: 'Hi sunt, qui fornicantur, postquam assumpserunt corpus et sanguinem domini nostri Jesu Christi, et non sunt reversi ad penitenciam usque ad mortem.' 'Domine, qui sunt hi, qui usque ad labia?' 'Hi sunt detractores et falsi testes et qui murmuraverunt in ecclesia et non audiverunt verbum domini.' 'Qui usque ad supercilia?' 'Hi sunt, qui fictum animum habent in corde et annuunt male proximis suis, dum fidem habent ad illos. Et unusquisque homo, qui hoc peccatum facit, si non penitebit, cadit in infernum, sicut illi fecerunt.

The Vision of Charles the Fat<sup>5</sup> (A. D. 885):

Ubi reperi innumeras animas hominum et principum patris mei et fratrum meorum et meorum praecipitatas, alias usque ad capillos, alias usque ad mentum, alias usque ad umbilicum.

The Vision of Thurcill (A. D. 1206):<sup>6</sup>

Quarum quaedam usque ad verticem, quaedam usque ad collum, quaedam usque ad pectus et brachia, aliae ad umbilicum et renes, quaedam ad genus, et nonnullae vix usque cavillam pedum immersae fuerunt.

Jean de Meun mentions twice the "marsh of Hell." *Rose*, vv. 11602-3 and 14072-4:

Encor vous en jure et tesmoing  
La palu d'enfer à tesmoing.

<sup>4</sup> *Visio S. Pauli, Ein Beitrag zur Visionslitteratur*, von Herman Brandes, Halle, 1885.

<sup>5</sup> *Willelmi Malmesbiriensis Monachi De Gestis Regum Anglorum Libri Quinque*, Rolls Series, 2 vols., London, 1887; vol. II, § III.

<sup>6</sup> *Rogeri de Wendover Flores Historiarum*, Rolls Series, 3 vols., London; vol. II (1887), p. 20.

Quant Jupiter asséuroit  
 Junon sa fame, il li juroit  
 Le palu d'enfer hautement.<sup>7</sup>

The "marsh" is a constantly recurring feature of the places of punishment in the mediaeval visions; e. g., the Vision of Charles the Fat: "Sicque ascendimus super montes altissimos igneos, de quibus oriebantur paludes et flumina ferventia." The Vision of the Monk of Evesham<sup>8</sup> (A. D. 1196): "Pervenimus in regionem quandam nimis spatiosam, visu horrendam, palustri situ et luto in duritiem inspissato deformem."

The "pit of Hell" is mentioned in vv. 13186-7:

Vous en irés ou puis d'enfer,  
 Se vous ne vous en repentés.

There are several vague Biblical allusions to the pit as a place of punishment,<sup>9</sup> and many precise ones in the mediaeval visions; e. g., the Vision of Drihthelm<sup>10</sup> (A. D. 696): "Porro puteus ille flammivomus ac putidus, quem vidisti, ipsum est os gehennae." Vision of Charles the Fat: "Duxitque me in profundissimas valles et igneas, quae erant plenae puteis ardentibus pice, et sulphure, plumboque, et cera, et adipe." Vision of Tundal<sup>11</sup> (A. D. 1149): "Vidit fossam quadrangulam quasi cisternam, qui puteus putridam flamme et fumi emittit columpnam."

Jean de Meun's reference to the stench of Hell is distinctly mediaeval, and shows how far he was drawn from the Biblical picture of the other world by the doctrines current in his day.<sup>12</sup> *Rose*, vv. 15543-5:

Ce faus traître, ce truant,  
 Aut s'ame ou feu d'enfer puant  
 Qui la puist ardoir et destruire!

<sup>7</sup> Vv. 14072-4 are a paraphrase of vv. 635-6 of Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*, book I, with the substitution of the marsh of Hell for the river Styx. Cf. Langlois, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

<sup>8</sup> *Rogeri de Wendover Flores Historiarum*, vol. I (1886), p. 255.

<sup>9</sup> Numbers xvi 30; Job xxxiii 24; Isaiah xxxviii 17, 18.

<sup>10</sup> *Venerabilis Bedae Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, liber V, caput xii.

<sup>11</sup> *Visio Tnugdali*, hgg. von A. Wagner, Erlangen, 1882, p. 33.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, vol.

Compare the above citations from the Visions of Drihthelm and Tundal. Vision of St. Paul: "Et tulit eum ad septentrionem super puteum sigillatum sigillis, vii. Et dixit angelus: 'Vade longe, si non possis sustinere fetorem loci.' Et apertum est os putei, et surrexit quidam fetor super has omnes penas."

In v. 18, 810 ff. Jean de Meun describes the effects of great storms, stating that it is the common belief that the resulting destruction is the work of devils (vv. 18840-2):

Si dist-l'en que ce font déables  
A lor croz et à lor chaables,  
A lor ongles, a lor havez.

The enumeration of instruments used by devils is a feature of the visions of the 12th century and later,<sup>13</sup> though single instruments of torture are mentioned in earlier visions; *e. g.*, the Vision of Charles the Fat: "Et dum haec tremibundus auscultarem, ecce, nigerrimi daemones advolantes cum uncis igneis volebant apprehendere filum glomeris quem in manu tenebam, et ad se attrahere."

The gibbet of Hell, from which the damned are suspended, is mentioned in vv. 20201-6:

Quel guerredon puet-il atendre  
Fors la hart à li mener pendre  
Au dolereus gibet d'enfer,  
Ou sera pris et mis en fer,  
Rivés en aniaus pardurables,  
Devant le prince des déables?

This form of punishment is a feature of the mediaeval visions. Vision of St. Paul: "Vidit vero Paulus ante portas inferni arbores igneas et peccatores cruciatos et suspensos in eis. Alii pendebant pedibus, alii manibus, alii capillis, alii auribus, alii linguis, alii brachiis." St. Patrick's Purgatory<sup>14</sup> (A. D. 1153): "Alii ibi pen-

XXV, pp. 292-293. Isaiah xxxviii 17 is only apparently an exception. The word "corruption" of King James's version is a translation of the Hebrew substantive *beli*, whose literal meaning is "a wearing out." Hence the original contains no suggestion of putrefaction. The Vulgate makes no mention of the pit: "Tu autem eruisti animam meam, ut non periret."

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Pub. Mod. Lang. Assn.*, vol. XXV, pp. 287-8.

<sup>14</sup> *Matthei Parisiensis Chronica Majora*, Rolls Series, London, 1874; vol. II, pp. 192-203.

debant in flammis sulphureis, igneis cathenis per pedes et tibias, capitibus ad ima demissis, alii per manus et brachia, alii per capillos et capita; alii pendebant in flammis igneis in uncis ferreis et ignitis per oculos et nares, alii per aures et fauces, alii per testiculos et mamillas."

In vv. 20771-4, Jean de Meun enumerates the punishments which will be administered in Hell by the three provosts, "Alecto," "Thesiphoné," and "Megera":

Ces trois en enfer vous atendent;  
Ceus lient, batent, fustent, pendent,  
Hurtent, hercent, escorchent, foulent,  
Noient, ardent, greillent et boulent.

These are all forms of punishment described in the Christian visions, some of them repeatedly.

*Lient, ardent.* Vision of St. Paul: "Sicut dicit dominus en ewangelio: 'Ligate eos per fasciculos ad comburendum.'" Vision of Tundal: "Descendebat enim super illam laminam miserrimarum multitudo animarum et illic cremebantur, donec ad modum cremii in sartagine concremati omnino liquescerent, et, quod est gravius, ita colabantur per predictam laminam, sicut colari solet cera per pannum, et iterum in carbonibus ignis ardentibus renovabantur ad tormentum."

*Batent, fustent, hurtent, foulent.* St. Patrick's Purgatory: "Campus ille hominibus utriusque sexus et aetatis diversae, nudis et in terra jacentibus ventribus deorsum versis, plenus erat . . . Daemones etiam super miseros currentes, gravibus eos flagris caedebant."

*Pendent.* See, above, the discussion of vv. 20201-6 of the *Rose*.

*Hercent.* Vision of Tundal: "Habebant vero ipse, que pariebantur, bestie capita ardentia ferrea et rostra acutissima, quibus ipsa, unde exhibant, dilaniabant corpora."<sup>15</sup>

*Escorchent.* Vision of Tundal: "Et cum propius accederent, viderunt carnifices cum securibus et culturis et sarmentis et bisacutis cum dolabris et terebris et falcibus acutissimis, cum wangiis et fossoriis et cum ceteris instrumentis, quibus animas excoriare vel decollare vel findere vel truncare poterant."

<sup>15</sup> This is the closest parallel I have noted in the Latin visions to the French *hercer*, "to harrow." The word is doubtless to be taken in a figurative sense here, as in *Aliscans*, vv. 5813-4: Si l'ont point et hersé, En trente lieus li ont le corps navré.

*Noient.* St. Patrick's Purgatory: "Et ecce subito ventus turbinis vehementis, ab aquilone veniens, ipsos omnes et cum eis militem arripuit, et in aliam montis partem, in flumen frigidum et foetidum, flentes et vociferantes projecit. Et cum de aqua frigidissima surgere conarentur, daemones super aquam currentes in ipso omnes flumine summerserunt."

*Greillent.* Vision of Thurcill: "Sedes autem candentibus circulis ferreis et ex omni parte clavatis, superius et inferius, a dextris et a sinistris, exstructae erant, atque homines in eis diversae conditionis et sexus mirabiliter residebant."

*Boulent.* St. Patrick's Purgatory: "Vidit praeterea miles . . . domum innumeris caldariis plenam, quae piceis sulphureisque liquaminibus ac diversis repleta bullientibus metallis, homines utriusque sexus omnis conditionis et aetatis continebant." Vision of Thurcill: "Prima innumeras fornaces habebat et caldarias amplas et latas, pice ferventi et aliis liquaminibus ad summum usque repletas; in singulis autem animae congestae acriter bulliebant, quarum capita velut nigrorum piscium in ferventi liquamine, ex vi ebullitionis, nunc sursum praeminebant, nunc deorsum ruebant."

It can hardly be doubted, therefore, that Jean de Meun, in the passages cited, has laid under contribution his reminiscences of the mediaeval Christian visions. Not all the phenomena to which he refers are contained, to the writer's knowledge, in any one vision. Certainly it is true that not even the most detailed of all, the Vision of Tundal, contains every one. Therefore we are justified in concluding that Jean de Meun was acquainted with a number of them, as we must indeed have suspected from our already extensive information as to his knowledge of the Latin lore extant in his day.

STANLEY LEMAN GALPIN.

AMHERST COLLEGE.

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